

Introduction

English accents are powerful markers of national and social identity. The standard of what constitutes an accurate or a desirable accent of course changes over time, despite the tendency among speakers to assume that their attitudes to accents are natural, innate and ultimately ahistorical. However, the connotations of accents, that is how accents define speakers, are as powerful today as they have been ever since the word ‘accent’ acquired its current meaning as ‘a way of pronouncing a language that is distinctive to a country, area, social class, or individual’ (*OED*, *n.* 7a).¹ The earliest examples quoted in the *OED* are predictably from Shakespeare, although cutting remarks about uncouth English accents date as far back as Chaucer.² ‘Your accent is something finer than you could purchase in so removed a dwelling’ (3.2.334–5),³ says Orlando to Rosalind in *As You Like It*, implying that a rural accent is not as clear or as sophisticated as a courtly one. National accents are similarly the subject of humorous mockery in Shakespeare: in *The Reign of King Edward III*, a play now partly attributed to Shakespeare, the king reports how the Countess of Salisbury, besieged by the Scots, imitated their ‘broad’ speech as an act of defiance (2.195) and as a way of showing her natural superiority over her ‘barbarous’ enemies (2.201).⁴ ‘Broad’ was derogatory then as it is today, while ‘barbarous’ is used in its original, etymological sense of “not Latin nor Greek” and therefore “pertaining to those outside the Roman empire” . . . , hence “uncivilized and uncultured” (*OED*, *adj.* 1–3).

Accents are especially significant in relation to Shakespeare, because of the role that Shakespeare has played as England’s ‘National Poet’ in the establishment of a Standard English pronunciation (henceforth StP) since

¹ For other meanings of the word ‘accent’ in the early modern period, see, for example, Hope 2010: 99–105.

² Aley and John have a Northeastern inflection in ‘The Reeve’s Tale’.

³ All quotations from Shakespeare’s works, unless otherwise specified, are from Proudfoot et al., 2011.

⁴ Quotations from *The Reign of King Edward III* are from Proudfoot and Bennett, 2017.

the mid-eighteenth century. Efforts to standardize English pronunciation went hand in hand with the rise of English as the language of Empire.⁵ What is less well known is the recurrent alignment between those who championed a revival of Shakespeare on stage and those who advocated the need for a 'supra-regional standard' of pronunciation for all (Mugglestone 2007: 13). A good example is Thomas Sheridan (1719²–1788), the father of Richard Sheridan and the author of *A General Dictionary of the English Language* (1780), one of the earliest dictionaries of English Standard pronunciation. Sheridan also ensured the regular programming of Shakespeare's plays while he was stage manager at the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin between the mid-1740s and the mid-1750s.⁶ The accent most readily associated with correctness and distinction in England since then, and later known as Received Pronunciation (henceforth RP), has recently started to decline, acquiring negative connotations of snobbishness and elitism.⁷ However, the use of anything but an educated, Southern accent is still problematic when deployed on the Shakespearean stage.

In 2011, in an otherwise generous review of Roxana Silbert's production of *Measure for Measure* for the Royal Shakespeare Company (henceforth RSC), Ian Shuttleworth, for example, critiqued Jodie McNee's Isabella for sounding 'impassioned (and Liverpoolian)' and for 'lack[ing] much of either the religious or the sexual magnetism required' by the role (2011a). It is remarkable that, as recently as 2011, Shuttleworth regarded McNee's *accent* as an inappropriate vehicle to convey the psychological,

⁵ Representative of such efforts is James Buchanan's 1766 pamphlet 'An Essay towards Establishing a Standard for an Elegant and Uniform Pronunciation of the English Language *throughout the British Dominions*, and Practised by the Most Learned and Polite Speakers' (my emphasis). As late as 1917, in his preface to Daniel Jones's *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, linguist and educationist Walter Ripman stressed how, 'when a language is spread as widely over the world as ours is, a generally recognized form of speech is not less desirable than a common literary language' (v).

⁶ While Sheridan was stage manager at the Smock Alley Theatre, 43 out of the 145 productions staged during the 1749–50 season were Shakespeare's plays (Sheldon 1967: 153). Writing about 'the intimate connection between . . . the move towards the orthoepical doctrine and prescription that marks lexicography after Dr Johnson . . . and the theatre', Peter Holland gives further examples of mid-eighteenth century orthoepists who were connected to the revival of Shakespeare on stage, including William Kenrick, who had written *Falstaff's Wedding* (1766), a sequel to *2 Henry IV*, and aspired to edit Shakespeare, as suggested by his 1765 critique of Johnson's edition (*A Review*), and John Walker (1732–1807), who had acted at Drury Lane before he started a school of elocution and published his *Critical Pronouncing Dictionary and Expositor of the English Language* in 1791 (2007: 253–6).

⁷ By the 1970s, RP was negatively associated with privilege, arrogance and social exclusivity (see, for example, Gimson 1970). By the turn of the century, Nikolas Coupland noted that it was 'no longer permitted in British Society to be seen to discriminate against someone on the basis of their accent' (quoted in Trudgill 2002: 176). By the same token, 'some of the strongest sanctions [were] exercised against people who [were] perceived as being "posh" and "snobbish"' (Trudgill 2002: 176).

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personal and ethical qualities associated with Isabella's character. More generally, though, and despite a lingering prejudice against marked voices in Shakespearean performance, a veritable sea change is taking place, both on mainstream and fringe, national and regional stages, where non-standard accents are starting to inform casting and directorial decisions. As Chapter 1 shows, accents are now increasingly being used, along with other crucial markers of social identity, like race and gender, in order to activate a different interpretation of the fictive worlds of the plays and to challenge a traditional alignment of Shakespeare with cultural elitism.

However, while a considerable amount of attention has been paid to the benefits and challenges of unconventional race and gender casting,⁸ there has been no sustained attempt to gauge the impact of marked voices on the production and reception of Shakespeare in performance. The topic is therefore ripe for further exploration and this study, which offers the first book-length critical analysis of the use and connotations of accents in Shakespearean performance over the last four hundred years, builds on the growing interest in the voice in several disciplines, ranging from philosophy to sociolinguistics, from historical phonology to theatre and performance studies.

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The 'performative turn' that took place within the humanities in the second half of the twentieth century directed attention towards the 'felt experience of the voice',⁹ which began to be understood not as a mere carrier or vehicle, but as a central constituent element of speech. Though focusing primarily on the singing voice, Roland Barthes wrote about the voice as having its own 'grain', which is produced by the material body as it speaks its own mother tongue (1982 [1977]: 182). By writing about 'the body of the voice' (1982 [1977]: 188), Barthes shifted critical interest from the semantic to the vocalic qualities of speech. More recent philosophers of the voice have continued to highlight the role of the material attributes of the voice – including intonation, pitch, rhythm and accent – in determining how speech is produced, heard and decoded. Giorgio Agamben has, for example, drawn attention to 'that which one necessarily says without

⁸ See, for example, Thompson (2006) and Bulman (2008).

⁹ I borrow this suggestive phrase from Katie Adkison's 'Singularity and Bare Voice: The Politics of Vocal Representation in *Coriolanus*', a paper discussed as part of the 'Locating (And Dislocating) Voices in Shakespeare' seminar, led by Bruce R. Smith at the Shakespeare Association of America conference in Los Angeles in March 2018.

knowing', that is to how the interplay between the vocalic and the semantic produces signification (1991: 89). Similarly inspiring and suggestive is Adriana Cavarero's insistence that we consider not only the material qualities of the voice, but also its sociability, by establishing how those qualities are heard and decoded by other speakers. In order for a voice to register as such, as opposed to mere noise, an embodied speaker needs to connect with an embodied listener, making the production and reception of the spoken word intrinsically relational and inevitably political activities. In other words, when considering speech, we need to be mindful not only of what is being said, but also by whom, how and under what circumstances. Cavarero's main focus on vocality, that is 'the whole of the activities and values that belong to the voice as such, independently of language' (2005: 12), makes her work less directly relevant to my own interest in how accent affects the production and reception of (Shakespearean) meaning on stage. Cavarero also stops short of considering how unique speakers and listeners 'appear to each other in the first place' (Burgess and Murray 2006: 169), that is how context informs how speech is produced, heard and decoded. Conversely, I aim specifically to reconstruct the historical contexts within which marked voices have been deployed on the Shakespearean stage and how these contexts have affected the way in which these voices have been interpreted over time.

Theatre studies have started to respond to the need to historicize the auditory dimensions of speech. In his book on *Dramatic Theories of Voice in the Twentieth Century*, Andrew Kimbrough takes as his starting point the assumption that '[t]here is more to language than what meets the eye, so to speak', and celebrates the fact that 'various disciplines in the twentieth century went to the ear and the body to prove it' (2010: 12):

The tradition of western philosophy generally has been less concerned with individuals and the circumstances of their embodiment than with universals, the abstract, and at times, the metaphysical. A concrete and individual voice, replete with gender, ethnicity, age, and dialect, has little room within this frame. Therefore, . . . when the unique, resonant, and particular human voice surfaces and makes itself heard, it unhinges the scaffolding upon which visualist philosophy is secured. (2010: 7)

Kimbrough then proceeds to identify and discuss twentieth-century experimental theatre directors and theorists, including Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, and Richard Schechner, and avant-garde performers and collectives, such as Robert Wilson, Richard Foreman,

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Karen Finley, Laurie Anderson and the Wooster Group, who promoted the ‘aesthetic presentation of the human voice’. His analysis of the work of these artists shows how ‘ideality’, including ‘our regard of ourselves’ or ‘the contents of thought’, is made present ‘in performance through vocalization’ (2010: 260, 22). Kimbrough however regrets that an adequate level of theorization and historicization has not as yet matched such a rich range of practices:

Until recently, theatre scholarship focused almost exclusively on the visual artifact: the body, the *mise-en-scène*, and the dramatic text. A handful of articles on the voice serve as exceptions, but the exceptions tend to suffer because, as a discipline, we have yet to create a critical language adequate to address the voice. (2010: 2)

To sum up, at least according to Kimbrough, scholarship is currently lagging behind theatrical practices, which effectively foreground the material, vocal and aesthetic qualities of the voice and their impact on the modulation of (fictive) identities.

This blind spot in contemporary theatre studies does not seem to have affected work specifically focused on the place of the voice on the early modern stage, which has in fact proved to be a particularly exciting and fast-developing area of research interest. In *The Acoustic World of Early Modern England*, Bruce R. Smith has, for example, reconstructed ‘a world view centered on sound’, by highlighting how ‘one of the ways in which early modern subjects achieved selfhood [was] through speech’ (1999: 165). When dealing with ‘the auditory field of the play’, Smith privileges the impact of the position of the actors and how their voices projected and resonated within the physical space defined by the architecture of an early modern amphitheatre, or indoor theatre:

Instead of characters, we might more accurately talk about the “persons” of the play. Not only is “person” the term used by early modern witnesses themselves; it also captures the double sense of person as a body (the actor’s) and a voice (. . . from *per-sonare*, “to sound through”). (1999: 280)

Despite the lack of sound recordings from the period, Smith shows that an archaeological recovery of sound, though based on written archival sources, is not only possible but that it can help us understand how the act of voicing and hearing constituted speakers and listeners into socially and historically defined ‘acoustic communities’ (1999: 166). Smith draws attention to a fascinating range of ‘dialects, varieties, registers, and codes’ . . . as well as ‘means of communication’ beyond ‘phonemic speech . . . includ[ing] singing, whistling, drumming, horn calling’ and, ultimately, ‘whatever sound-making

keeps the community in aural contact with one another' (1999: 43). Smith however does not consider national, regional or class accents and how they may have impacted on the delivery and decoding of Shakespeare's plays as originally performed on the early modern stage.

Similarly interested in how listeners of Shakespeare as performed on the early modern stage constituted and re-constituted themselves into interpretative communities is Wes Folkerth's book, *The Sound of Shakespeare*. Particularly useful is Folkerth's insight according to which sound is 'closely linked to ideas about identity and the representation of identity in the period . . . [b]ecause [it] was thought to communicate and commingle with the spiritual essences of people and objects' (2002: 56). Although invested in establishing how the soundscape of a Shakespearean play 'would have been received by people who heard and understood [it] in specific contexts, with early modern ears' (2002: 9), Folkerth, like Smith, overlooks accents as a determinant of early modern subjectivities. Also groundbreaking in terms of its stated commitment to the 'historicization of the voice' is Gina Bloom's *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound*, where she establishes how the voice, as opposed to the logocentric quality of regulated speech, was believed to possess a specific type of volatile and unruly agency and to have a powerful, physical impact on the listeners. Once again, though, Bloom focuses on exploring the gender implications of early modern philosophies of the voice, but she does not address the use of dialect or accents in early modern drama, because neither dialect nor accent is directly relevant to her gender-focused approach.

And yet accents need to be carefully considered to understand how sound constituted early modern speakers and listeners, because they functioned as prime markers of early modern (dramatic) subjectivities, as the extracts discussed in the next section suggest. Accents, as much as the other material features of the early modern voices addressed by theatre historians so far, need to be studied in the specific cultural, historical and linguistic contexts in which they were originally spoken, heard and decoded. While historical phonetics has made the most significant contribution to date to our understanding of early modern spoken English, it has also highlighted important methodological challenges. The next section therefore goes on to show how powerfully connotative English accents were on the early modern stage and how I have approached the methodological challenges associated with an historically informed analysis of voices that have long gone, leaving 'not a rack behind'.

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In Brome's *The English Moor* (1659, WING B4872), Mandeville Quicksands teases Phillis Winloss, saying 'O th'art a Norfolk woman (cry thee mercy) / Where Maids are Mothers, and Mothers are Maids' (C6, 23–4). These punning lines suggest that Brome's audience would have recognized 'modder' as a regional variant associated with East Anglia, meaning 'a girl or young woman' or 'a girl just growing into womanhood'.¹⁰ The pun is particularly funny and salacious in the context of this short exchange because Phillis introduces herself to Quicksands as 'a Mother that do lack a service'; but Quicksands initially fails to decode her regional use of the word 'mother/modder' and promptly rejects her: 'You have said enough. I'll entertain no Mothers. / A good Maid servant, knew I where to find one' (C6, 17–18). Seemingly outraged, Phillis retorts: 'He is a knave, and like your worship, that / Dares say I am no Maid' (C6, 19–20).

What makes this exchange even funnier, of course, is the fact that Phillis is not a maid and that she is not from Norfolk! Phillis is in fact the spirited and resourceful daughter of Winloss, a gentleman who, having lost all his money in lawsuits brought against him by two other gentlemen, Meanwell and Rashley, has been forced to leave the country to seek his fortune overseas. Left to fend for herself, Phillis ends up winning back the gallant Nathaniel Banelass, who has seduced and abandoned her, mostly through her ability to look and sound other than who she is: at key moments in the play she dons disguises and modulates her voice, most notably when she imitates the Norfolk regional variation at the core of this exchange with Quicksands and when she adopts a 'blackface' dialect to personate a Moor in 4.4.¹¹ Arguably her 'blackface' speech amounts to little more than a crude stage dialect, even in a play which is rightly celebrated for presenting interestingly 'inconsistent discourses about race' (Steggle 2004: 128), and at a time 'when London supported a growing and, for the moment, increasingly tolerated black community' (Steggle, 'Introduction'). But her sophisticated grasp of a regional accent is remarkable and her ability to imitate it helps her protect her identity and get a job: after initially spurning Phillis, Quicksands is attracted by the 'wholesomeness' of her

¹⁰ 'modder, n. α. Etymology: Of uncertain origin; Etymon: mother *n.t.*; origin uncertain; perhaps originally a variant of mother (*OED*, *n.t.*); see also *EDD*: 'modder, Yks. [Yorkshire] Glo. [Gloucestershire] Hrt. [Hertfordshire] eAn. [East Anglia] Wil. [Wiltshire]; also mauther w.Yks. [West Yorkshire], e.An. Ess. [Essex] Wil.; morthier Suf. [Suffolk]; and in forms maadhur Ess.; modder Cmb. [Cambridgeshire] Nr. [Norfolk] Suf. Ess.; modhdher e.An.; modher Cmb. Nrf. Suf. Ess.; motha Glo'.

¹¹ Examples of Phillis's blackface dialect include 'But howa can ita be donea' and 'I will doa my besta' (E4, 9; 13).

regionally inflected speech and mimics it in the aside that concludes this exchange: 'This innocent countrey Mother takes me. / Her looks speak Wholesomness' (C6v, 21–2).

The bawdy quality of the 'mawther (modder)/mother' regional pun is heightened by further wordplay triggered by Phillis's association with Norfolk and East Anglia more generally.

QUICKSANDS	But where about in <i>Norfolk</i> wert thou bred?
PHILLIS	At <i>Thripperstown</i> Sir, near the City of <i>Norwich</i> .
QUICKSANDS	Where they live much by spinning with the Rocks?
PHILLIS	Thripping, they call it, Sir.

(C6, 33–6)

Thripperstown is a fictional location that serves a dual purpose here. On a purely linguistic level, it allows Phillis to pun on the meaning of 'thripping' as 'spinning' (*OED*, v.3) and as the jerking of thumb and fingers, as they pull on the yarn (*OED*, v.2), with its obvious sexual undertones.¹² On a more contextual level, it reminds the audience of the thriving spinning industry in East Anglia, which, as Matthew Steggle has pointed out, 'creat[ed] the exports . . . enabl[ed] by imports from Africa'. The regional accent used by Phillis, along with references to the local economy of the region, allows Brome to hint at the origin of the slaving trade, a concern which, still according to Steggle, is central to the play as whole ('Introduction'). Regional variation is therefore a key dramatic feature in this exchange and the sustained punning linked to it depends entirely on the assumption that early modern audiences would recognize it and that they would be alert to its connotations, which are not generically rustic but specifically associated with a region and its local economy.

This example shows that regional dialect and phonetic variation were used on the early modern stage to achieve specific and nuanced dramatic effects. As Manfred Görlach has put it, if it is true that 'the loss of regional features in the writing of "provincials" was so rapid in the fifteenth century that no consistent dialect, or even regional characteristics that would allow attribution to a particular place, are normally found in written evidence', the sporadic use of dialect is all the more significant, because 'whenever a sixteenth- to eighteenth-century writer chose to use [it], this . . . [was] due to a conscious decision to aim for a special effect' (1999: 506). By and

¹² The same pun is used later in the play in 4.5, when Arnold says of Quicksand's illegitimate and mentally disabled child, Timsy, that 'he has learn'd to thrip among the Mothers; / But . . . to do more harm than good by't, because 'by his cunning at the Rock, / And twirling of his spindle on the Thrip-skins, / He has fetch'd up the bellies of sixteen / Of his Thrip-sisters' (E5, 12–13; 17–20).

large, though, historical linguists and phoneticians have tended to disagree about the significance and social connotations attached to English accents as used by early modern writers. Paula Blank has for example argued that, generally speaking, '[early modern] authors borrow accents, briefly, to serve their turn' and that the regionally or class inflected voices reproduced in their work were constructs that 'had, finally, nothing to do with the "people" at all' (1996: 99). Writing more specifically about the early modern stage, Jonathan Hope has similarly argued that accents were 'non-realist symbols of identity' (2010: 112). However, what the Brome extract above shows is that, although the connotations of stage accents may not have mapped precisely on how accents were used and heard off stage, they signified in highly specific, local ways that were recognizable both within the fictive world of the play and among members of its original audience.

Also worth stressing is how this diversity of views stems first and foremost from practical methodological challenges that apply more generally to the study of early modern voices, both on and off stage. As Susan Fitzmaurice and Jeremy Smith explain,

[s]tudents of the history of English pronunciation have a major problem . . . : for the most part, they have to approach their subject indirectly. Until the end of the nineteenth century, there are no recordings of speech, and for that reason scholars depend on comments of contemporaries (often frustratingly vague) on the analysis of spelling or verse or on reconstruction, and none of these resources is problem-free. We have evidence, but interpreting that evidence is a challenging enterprise. (2012: 33)

Even so, the phonetic spelling used in early modern manuscripts and printed texts¹³ and the writings by early modern spelling reformers, who lamented the widening gap between written and spoken English,¹⁴ provide enough evidence to establish that early modern English was characterized by great acoustic diversity. As Hope has pointed out, 'current spoken English retains at least as much variation as would have been found in early modern spoken English'. Besides, as Hope goes on to remind us, acoustic diversity in the early modern period was also amplified by the Great Vowel Shift, which 'increased the variety of possible pronunciations'

¹³ By phonetic spelling, phoneticians mean a type of spelling that, at a time when orthography had not become fully standardized, reflected pronunciation rather than a conventionally sanctioned written form.

¹⁴ Among them, the most prominent were Thomas Smith (1513–1577), Jon Hart (c. 1501–1574), William Bullokar (c. 1531–1609), Richard Mulcaster (1531/2–1611), George Puttenham (1529–1590/91), Robert Cawdrey (1537/8?–d. in or after 1604) and Alexander Gill (1565–1635).

at a time when changing sounds 'did not all move together, and . . . did not move at the same time for all speakers' (1999: 251).

The extent to which acoustic diversity defined speakers in terms of their nationality, social status and class, on and off the early modern stage, remains, however, a moot question. As the extracts from Brome above show, accents could be used to great dramatic effect. But the frequency with which accents were used on the early modern stage is harder to establish, because, unlike other literary forms, the oral dimension of drama was mostly lost, as plays were transmitted from performance into print. Also challenging is deciding how early modern listeners heard and decoded national, regional and class accents. What did it mean for an early modern English speaker to sound like a Northerner or a Scot; or, even more to the point, what did it mean for an early modern actor (or the fictive character an early modern actor personated) to sound like a Northerner or a Scot on the Shakespearean stage? How did the English spoken by the educated and uneducated inhabitants of the Capital measure up against the regional dialects and accents associated with rural elites or the English spoken by their servants or local labourers? And how did early modern audiences react to these regional and class accents, when they were used on the Shakespearean stage?

While discussing the methodological challenges involved in answering these questions, Hope sounds an important cautionary note about the risk of imposing our own parameters of acoustic decorum onto a period that predated the emergence of a non-regional standard associated with well-educated, elite speakers. He therefore takes his distance from other recent scholars, who have detected an emergent standard associated with London and the Court in Shakespeare's time. As Hope puts it, '[t]here [was] no sense of a fine-grained social order associated with regional dialects, nor of an upper / lower class split' (2008: 219–220). Other scholars however believe that broad, if not fine-grained, associations of national, regional and class variations with varying levels of prestige (or lack therefore) cannot easily be discounted. Among them, Charles Laurence Barber, for example, queried Börje Holmberg's view that social accents had no role to play in Shakespeare's England, by pointing out how difficult it is to explain away references by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors to 'vulgar pronunciations' (1986: 178 [288]).¹⁵

¹⁵ Even Barber, though, cautions us from assuming that regional accents would automatically be negatively connotated as uncouth and lower status, as it would become the case after the rise of StP in the eighteenth century (see Barber 1997). Among the scholars who detect the emergence of a prestige accent in Shakespeare's time, see, for example, Dobson 1968 and Fox 2000.